

# Introduction

**S**CHOOL READINESS is an important issue facing the nation. The first Education Goal states, “all children in America will start school ready to learn.”<sup>5</sup> Since the establishment of this goal, the issue of children’s preparedness for school has drawn increased attention from legislators, policy makers, and educators who face accountability pressures. The national Goal 1 (Ready to Learn) subgroup defined school readiness and recommended assessment principles and guidelines, but did not adopt a national school readiness assessment.<sup>6</sup> Thus, we do not have regularly reported national information about children’s skills as they enter school. In the late 1990s, the U.S. Department of Education began a national study of children, following them from kindergarten through fifth grade. This study provided national information about children’s school readiness skills in 1998–99. Whenever possible, findings from North Carolina’s Fall 2000 School Readiness Assessment are compared to findings from this national study of kindergartners.

Because there is no national school readiness assessment, some states have developed their own. As of 1999, 13 states conducted statewide screenings or assessments for children entering kindergarten; an additional 16 states were working on school readiness initiatives, but no state had a formal definition of school readiness.<sup>7</sup>

School readiness is an important issue in North Carolina. North Carolina’s First in America, State Board of Education, and Smart Start goals have each emphasized school readiness.<sup>8</sup> In 1999, the Ready for School Goal Team, a state task force of members from the early childhood and public school communities, was charged with developing a definition of school readiness and a plan for assessing school readiness statewide.<sup>9</sup> The North Carolina definition of school readiness and the task force’s assessment plan are described briefly below.

## Definition of School Readiness

North Carolina has defined school readiness as

- a) the condition of children when they enter school, and
- b) the capacity of schools to educate all children.